

Nagoonberries

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Nagoonberries grow close to the ground on erect stems arising from spreading, underground root-stock. Nagoonberry plants produce dark rose to red flowers and red fruit composed of many small drupelets resembling a round raspberry. Each leaf has three leaflets with sharp-toothed edges. The name of the berry comes from *goon*, a word in Tlingit that means “jewel.” Tlingit elders say the berries are like little jewels popping up from the ground.

Nagoonberries are found in damp or wet woodsy places in coastal and Interior Alaska. Except for a few closely guarded patches, they are not found in sizable quantities. They are soft and easily crushed, so it's best to gather them in shallow containers. The fruit ripens in late summer. For the best flavor, berries should be fully ripe when picked.

The fruit is a superior tasting berry of good color that makes an excellent jelly.



Photo by Matt Goff

Storage and Preservation

How to Clean and Store

Nagoonberries are very fragile. Unless they are exceptionally dusty, do not wash them. Eat them the day they are picked for best flavor. Nagoonberries should be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator, but they will not keep more than two or three days. Store in shallow containers to prevent crushing the berries.

How to Freeze

Spread nagoonberries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place in the freezer. When frozen, transfer the berries to freezer bags or containers. Frozen nagoonberries stored in airtight containers below 0°F will last up to two years.

How to Dry

Nagoonberries are not recommended for drying because they are too seedy and slow to dry. Nagoonberry puree may be used to make fruit leather.

How to Extract Juice

Combine 4 cups cleaned nagoonberries with 1 cup water. Crush berries. Bring just to a simmer, cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Place in jelly bag or layers of cheesecloth in a colander. Let the juice drip into a bowl. For clear juice, do not twist or press jelly bag or cheesecloth. For long-term storage, the juice should be frozen or canned.

Yield: 2 cups

Hot pack for juice

Sterilize canning jars. Heat juice, stirring occasionally, until it begins to boil. Pour into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process in a boiling water canner.

Pints or quarts 5 minutes

How to Prepare Puree

Cooked method: Add 1 cup of water to 4 cups of nagoonberries. Cook until softened. Crush berries. Press through sieve or food mill. Discard skins and seeds. *Yield: 2 cups*

Uncooked method: Rinse 4 cups of nagoonberries, drain, put in a blender and blend until the consistency of a thick puree. *Yield: 2 cups*

For long-term storage, the puree should be frozen: Pack into rigid containers leaving ½ inch headspace for expansion and freezing. Seal and freeze. Canning is not a safe method of preserving puree.

Recipes

Nagoonberry Syrup

1 cup nagoonberry juice
2 cups sugar
1 teaspoon lemon juice

Combine nagoonberry and lemon juices and sugar in a saucepan and heat to 160°F. Use a candy thermometer; do not boil. The syrup is ready to use over waffles, pancakes, hot biscuits, ice cream and other desserts. Syrup will keep up to six months in the refrigerator without sugaring.

For long-term storage: Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Immediately pour hot syrup into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water canner. (See below for steps in using a boiling water canner.)

Yield: 2 cups

Nagoonberry Fruit Leather

2 cups nagoonberry puree
2 tablespoons honey or corn syrup

Combine puree and sweetener. Line cookie sheet with plastic wrap. Spread puree mixture evenly about ⅛ to ¼ inch thick over plastic, but do not push it completely to the sides of the cookie sheet. Oven dry at 140°F for approximately 6 hours, leaving oven door slightly open so moisture can escape. If drying in a dehydrator, follow manufacturer's directions for fruit leathers. *Yield: 1 sheet*

Nagoonberry Jelly

5¾ cups nagoonberry juice
¼ cup lemon juice
6 cups sugar
3 ounces liquid pectin

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Open liquid pectin pouch and stand upright in a cup or glass. Combine nagoonberry and lemon juices and sugar in a large saucepan. Place on high heat; stir constantly and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Add the liquid pectin and heat again to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly skim off foam. Immediately pour hot jelly into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water canner. *Yield: 8 cups*

- **To sterilize canning jars,** boil in water for 5 minutes.
- **To prepare two-piece lids** (rings and tops), wash, rinse and keep in hot water until ready to use.
- **If less sugar is desired** in recipes calling for pectin, be sure to use no-sugar-needed pectin and follow the instructions on the box.
- **To use a boiling water canner,** see instructions on page 3.

Nagoonberry Sorbet

2 cups nagoonberry juice or puree
2 tablespoon lemon juice
1 cup sugar
1 cup water

In a medium saucepan, heat the water and sugar until dissolved. Bring to a boil, simmer 2 minutes; let cool. Stir the lemon juice and nagoonberry juice or puree into the cooled sugar syrup. Chill the mixture for several hours, then freeze the mixture in an ice cream machine according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Resources

Jams and Jellies – Lesson 5, Food Preservation Series, FNH-00562E
Canning Overview – Lesson 2, Food Preservation Series, FHN-00562B
Collecting and Using Alaska's Wild Berries and Other Wild Products (\$10), FNH-00120
Fruit Leather, FNH-00228
Canning Basics DVD (\$5), FNH-01280
Jams and Jellies DVD (\$5), FNH-01290

To process in a boiling water canner, follow these steps:

Fill the canner halfway with water. Preheat water to a low boil. Place filled jars, fitted with lids, into the canner on the rack. Add more boiling water, if needed, so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. Turn heat to its highest position until water boils vigorously. When the water boils, set a timer for the recommended processing time indicated in the recipe. Cover with the canner lid and lower heat setting to maintain a gentle boil throughout the processing time. Add more boiling water, if needed, to keep the water level above the jars.

When the jars have been boiled for the recommended time, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars and place them on a towel, leaving at least 1 inch of space between the jars during cooling.

After cooling jars for 12 to 24 hours, remove the screw bands and test seals. Press the middle of the lid with a finger. If the lid springs up when finger is released,

the lid is unsealed. If a lid fails to seal on a jar, remove the lid and check the jar-sealing surface for tiny nicks. If necessary, change the jar, add a new, properly prepared lid and reprocess within 24 hours using the same processing time. Alternately, adjust headspace to 1½ inches and freeze, or store in the refrigerator and use within three days.

If lids are tightly sealed on cooled jars, remove screw bands, wash the lid and jar to remove food residue, then rinse and dry jars. Label and date the jars. Store in a clean, cool, dark, dry place.



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